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SILVIA RIBEIRO

From Rio de Janeiro, 35-year-old Ribeiro got her athletic start as a pro volleyball player in her native Brazil. At 26, she was working toward her doctor of dentistry degree (which she earned, and she later practiced as a dentist) when she was spotted on the street by a modeling scout and quickly embarked on a globetrotting career that continues today. This season's travels, though, will revolve around training camps as Ribeiro targets a spot at the Ironman 70.3 World Championship and earning her pro card.

as told to
JULIA BEESON POLLORENO



JOHN DAVID BECKER



I used to play volleyball when I was a teenager and used to be a professional from 1999–2002. But my family didn't give me support to follow this dream. I had to go to college, and that's the reason I became a dentist. When I was playing volleyball I played for a big club in Brazil and they had a triathlon team and I thought, 'Wow, that looks so hard, I would never be able to do that.'

I got into one of the best universities in Brazil, and there was a lot of competition to get in. When I was in the middle of college, a model scout saw me and gave me his card. He asked me, 'What do you think about becoming a model?' and I said, 'I don't think so.' I was already 26 and almost graduating from dentistry school. I put his card in my backpack and thought, 'No way am I going to call this guy.' Months later I was cleaning my apartment and found his card and thought, 'Why not? Let's give it a chance.' He took me to a really good agency and things happened so fast. I started traveling around the world. I graduated from college but it was really hard to combine those two professions—a dentist and a model—so after a year and a half I had to decide. In 2009,

I decided to be a model full time.

When I became a model my agency told me after two years, 'Now you have to go to New York.' In New York they are really strict about measurements, and it's a really tough market. I had to lose some measurements because I've always been an athlete. So I started running and started doing spinning classes and met a lot of triathletes. They told me, 'You should try it because you have the body type for it,' and I said, 'No way; I don't have time for that.' But I kept running and spinning and then I literally fell in love with triathlon.

I was in Germany for modeling work in winter and it was snowing a lot and I couldn't train outside, so I spent a lot of time in my apartment watching Ironman videos.

I've lived everywhere and been to 40 countries. South Africa, Spain, Italy, France, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, United States, Germany.

I was getting a lot of work in New York but one day I got a phone call from my booker and he told me to come to the agency right away. He said all the clients were complaining about my body. I was too athletic and had to stop training. I told him no. I was already 30

check in

years old, and I'm such an anxious and hyper person, running helps to calm me down. He said, 'Then you should drink a glass of wine every night. No, a bottle—it will help you!' I said I wasn't going to start doing that, and he said, 'Or even better you should smoke marijuana!' I started laughing because I thought he was joking, but he wasn't. After that, he didn't book me a single job. So I decided to move to Miami and said, 'I want to do what I love. I want to train for triathlon.'

I came to Miami and did my first sprint-distance race in 2011. I had a horrible, heavy aluminum bike and had not been training properly. After that race I looked for a coach and started following a schedule.

I put all my heart, my soul and my mind into what I'm doing. I really love triathlon. I'm happy when I'm training and struggling, I love the feeling and can't believe I'm finally doing what I love. I decided to leave those lives as a dentist and model behind, but I have no regrets because I'm doing what I love and I have the feeling that everything is going to be all right because I'm training with my entire heart and soul. Money is not the focus for me. For me, it's to do what I love to do. When I'm doing sports, my mind and body connect and I have the feeling of really knowing myself. I know my limits, my weakness, my strength—everything.

I was living in Brazil for the past two years because I was hosting a TV show there. Basically I was traveling around the world looking for beautiful places to ride my bike.

When I got back to the U.S. I was not expecting to work that much as a model. But I did really well the last season here in Miami. I'm happy for that.

"I'M HAPPY WHEN I'M TRAINING AND STRUGGLING; I LOVE THE FEELING AND CAN'T BELIEVE I'M FINALLY DOING WHAT I LOVE."

My boyfriend [Rafael Gonçalves] is also a triathlete. He's training now with Siri Lindley. She's unbelievable. He also had to make a really tough decision because he was working two jobs in Brazil. He decided to leave to follow his dream, and that's the reason we came to the U.S. together. He was considered the best swimmer in the world in triathlon. In 2013 he was first [age-grouper] out of the water at the Ironman World Championship, and the same last year. He was leading the swim course with the dolphins beside him. I cried!

My strength is the bike. I love being on the bike. The feeling is amazing. Running is my weakness. After a long bike ride it's hard to find your legs. I don't have a background as a swimmer, and I'm not the best but I'm doing pretty good.

There is a huge crew behind the camera—the photographer, lighting guy, producer—and you are the focus. You can't show them weakness. You need to show confidence otherwise they will want another model because there's a lot of competition. In triathlon it's the same thing. When I'm struggling in a race you can't show weakness; you need to show that you're confident and strong. ■